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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIA WEEKLY UPDATE (5/21 - 5/25)

¶1. This cable summarizes the week's notable events relating to Serbia and Kosovo.

¶2. Summary: With a government formed, media and public attention in Serbia has returned to Kosovo and speculation on the likelihood of a UNSC resolution based on the Ahtisaari plan. In a late-breaking development on the afternoon of 5/25, the GOS decided to officially ask the UN Secretary General for new talks on Kosovo status. In general, all the key figures -- Kostunica, Tadic and the new FM Jeremic -- continue voicing strong opposition to the proposed resolution and support for Russia's "principled stand" against an imposed solution for Kosovo. Tadic and Jeremic spoke publicly against "self-isolation" by straining relations with countries that recognize Kosovo, a policy advocated by Kostunica and his party. Interestingly, while Serbian media are referring to the draft UNSC resolution as the "U.S.-EU" or "U.S.-German" proposal, Kostunica calls it simply the U.S. proposal. End Summary.

Government Actions

¶3. In a late-breaking development on 5/25, the GOS held a session calling for "launching a new phase of negotiations on the future status of Kosovo-Metohija," and forwarded it to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. According to the GOS statement, negotiations held "from February 21, 2006 to March 10, 2007," failed to reach an agreement and a new round of talks was necessary to reach an agreement "by all sides." The GOS called for "a positive atmosphere... suitable procedure and...adequate time framework without imposing artificial deadlines" for the talks. The statement concluded that the GOS "aware of the historical importance of a just solution to the problem...is willing to take full responsibility for the successful course and conclusion of negotiations."

¶4. Prime Minister Kostunica resumed his public campaign against Kosovo independence through Serbian media and in meetings with foreign leaders. Kostunica told FoNet on 5/25 that the GOS would "immediately annul" any document that would allow for Kosovo's independence, such as what he calls "the U.S. proposal" to the UNSC. Also, on Russian television on 5/20, Kostunica said that the rights of Serbs are being violated in Kosovo, and both UNMIK and Ahtisaari are "deceiving" the international community. He noted low numbers of returns by Serbs as evidence that Serbs are not safe in Kosovo. In interview with state news agency Tanjug, Kostunica repeated his assurances that Serbia will not trade acceptance of Kosovo independence for swifter accession to the EU.

¶5. In a 5/23 meeting in Belgrade, Kostunica told Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President Rene Van der Linden that Serbia's respect for European values "means that the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected with Serbia just as with other European states." Kostunica added that "indulging separatists' threats ...would have

detrimental consequences not only in the region, but also worldwide."

¶6. Belgrade media also covered President Tadic's 5/21 interview with a German newspaper in which he also warned that Kosovo independence could destabilize regions such as around the Black Sea. He stressed that "even if it wanted to, Serbia could not abandon Kosovo," and suggested that a Serbian state might not be able to function if Kosovo became independent. Tadic, however, said that he would not support damaging relations with countries that might recognize Kosovo, and said such a policy of "self-isolation" would be against the interests of Serbia's citizens. According to Belgrade media, in a meeting with Croatian President Mesic, Tadic reiterated that Kosovo's independence is "unacceptable" to Serbia.

¶7. New Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic followed Tadic's lead in his public statements and meetings this week. Belgrade media covered Jeremic's 5/22 interview with the Financial Times in which he said any move by the new GOS to "give up Kosovo" would bring down the government. Like Tadic, however, he said that the new government would never let Serbia slip back into the "traumatic isolation" of the past. Also this week, Jeremic and Kostunica delineated the GOS position on Kosovo to visiting Costa Rican FM Ugarte.

¶8. Slobodan Samardzic, Minister of the GOS' new Kosovo Ministry, announced on 5/21 that his Ministry will propose the composition for the GOS negotiating team. Samardzic told Tanjug that the negotiating team would be "definitely different" when it comes to personnel, compared to the current one, but "its core" would be retained. Also, the GOS announced that Dusan Prorokovic will be State Secretary for the Ministry (after the post was declined by former Tadic advisor Leon Kojen). Prorokovic is a DSS MP and was head of the Committee on Kosovo in the last Parliament. His statements on Kosovo are identical to Kostunica's.

¶9. In a statement from the Royal Palace, Crown Prince Alexander II
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announced his "strong support" for the "stands about the future of the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija taken by the National Assembly, the President of the Republic and the Premier of Serbia, and protests energetically against statements and plans which violate Serbia's state sovereignty and be little the Serbian people's historical, moral and cultural heritage." He said such plans "also grossly violate the very foundations of international law." The Prince added a reminder that "that Kosovo and Metohija were liberated from foreign occupation by his ancestors...and that democracy and freedom cannot be built on a denial of history, on injustice and the lack of human compassion." Hinting at EU integration, Alexander noted that "the common way towards a united Europe is the same for Serbia and for Kosovo and Metohija within Serbia...no one should try today to separate something which is inseparable using the pretext that all will be together again eventually."

USG Statements & Activity

¶10. Politika's Washington correspondent reported Department spokesperson McCormack support for the Ahtisaari plan as the best way to move forward, and a good basis for a UNSC resolution. Local media on 5/25 reported on USG envoy to UNOSK Frank Wisner's comments to VOA that UN discussions on Kosovo are progressing rapidly and that "the United States will press hard for acceptance of the envoy's plan for supervised independence of Kosovo."

¶11. In a meeting with Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan (and AmCit) Christopher of Chicago, the Ambassador reiterated the USG's strong support for the Ahtisaari plan and commitment to minority protections. The Ambassador also noted that Kosovo Serb returns are being obstructed by elements in northern Kosovo, and that leaders in Pristina are under intense pressure to rebuild Orthodox Churches and homes damaged in 2004.

Diplomatic Activity

¶12. Russia: Russian Ambassador to Serbia Alekseev noted in a 5/21 interview with Belgrade tabloid Kurir that in the absence of a solution for Kosovo that is agreed by both sides and comports with international law, Russia would have to look at possibility of exercising its right to use its veto in the UNSC. Commenting on former USG envoy Holbrooke's statement that Russia will be accountable should violence break out in Kosovo, Alexseev said that Holbrooke is accountable for the present situation in Kosovo. If violence erupts, the Russian Ambassador said, it will only support Russia's conclusion that the security situation in Kosovo is not satisfactory. On 5/23, advisor in the Russian Embassy Oleg Dziza told BETA news agency that Moscow's position on Kosovo would remain unchanged. Dziza said, "we are not using the word veto for technical reasons, but should the final solution on the Kosovo status be unacceptable, we shall not support the solution." Belgrade media also reported Russian President Putin's comments to Austrian President Fischer that he opposes an imposed Kosovo solution.

¶13. Italy: Belgrade media reported Italian FM D'Alema's 5/24 support for Kosovo's independence and urging for Belgrade to turn the page on "ideas of the past."

¶14. EU: Citing unnamed sources, Belgrade wire BETA reported on 5/21 that each EU member on the UNSC backs the draft resolution based on the Ahtisaari plan. BETA also cited "well-informed European diplomatic sources" that the EU's very firm position is that without a UNSC resolution and "both political and legal" clarity, the EU could not send a mission to Kosovo.

¶15. UK: During a 5/23 visit to Belgrade, UK political director Mark Grant said he expects a new UNSC resolution was "needed" and would be adopted soon. He also said that the aim of the new UNSC resolution on Kosovo does not award independence to Kosovo, but to lay the foundations for the Kosovo authorities to be able to ask for independence. He confirmed that the U.S.-EU Kosovo draft resolution did not mention independence because "it is not for the Council to grant independence to any country, nor does independence work that way."

¶16. Albania: Belgrade media reported Albanian PM Sali Berisha's comments that there are no alternatives to Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovo and his country's "full support" for a quick adoption of the plan.

¶17. Slovakia: Belgrade media also covered comments by Slovak FM Kubis that independence for Kosovo could encourage ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia to demand autonomy. Kubis' comments that the UNSC resolution text should stress the unique case in Kosovo also

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received coverage.

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